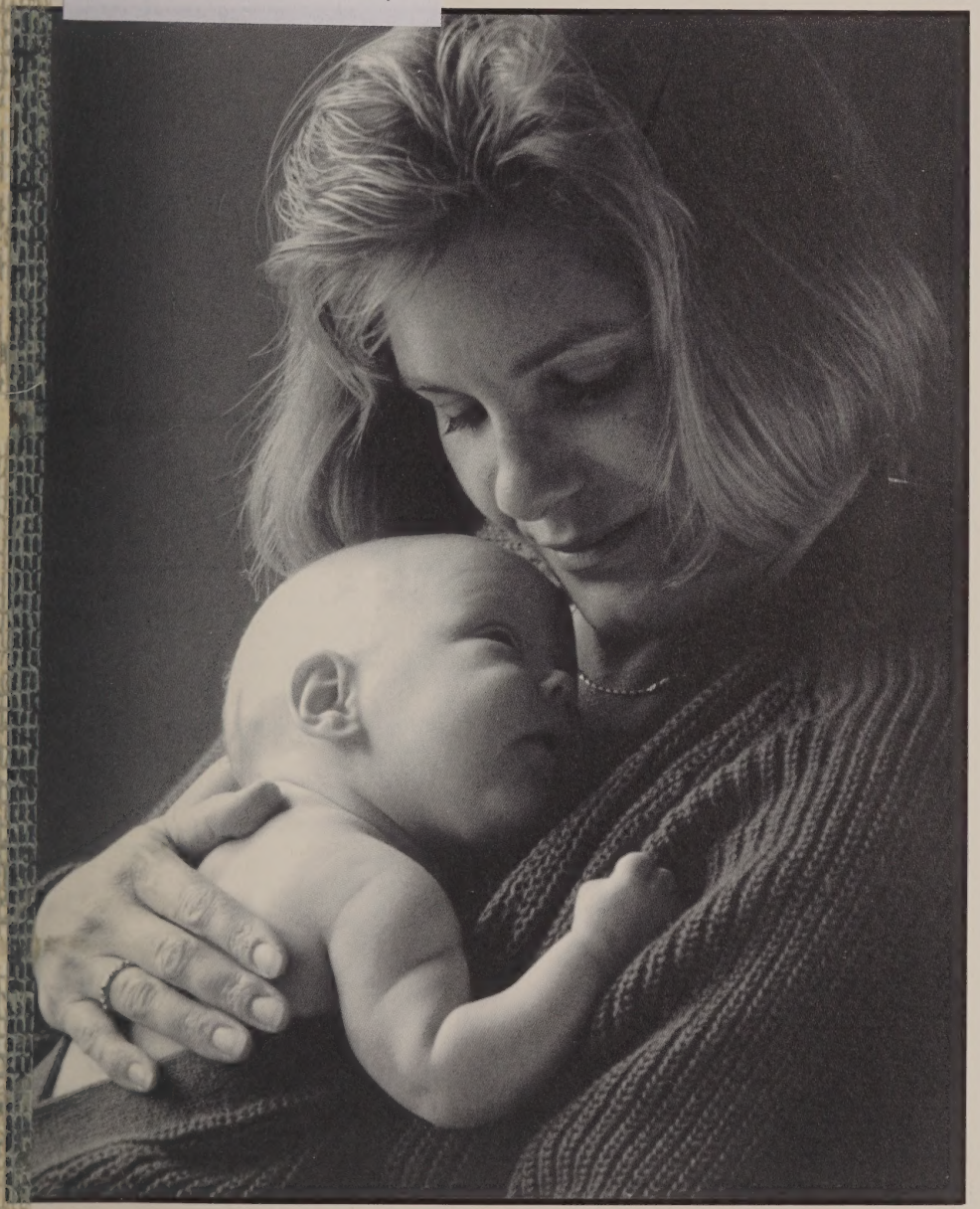
FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

v.44, no. 6 (Dec 1993)

Dec 1993



The purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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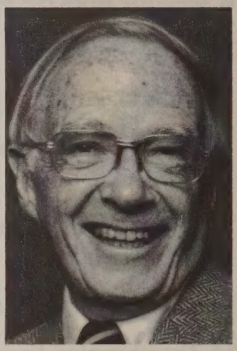


The birth of Christ, the anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment, the Festival of Lights, the winter solstice. . . December is a time for celebration; for celebrating and reflecting on our spiritual relationship to the divine, the God of many names, the ultimate source of our being and of all creation.

Joy and celebration don't always come easily, however. In a world of seemingly endless warfare, sickness and poverty, much of humanity seems to have lost its sense of the sacred, of its "reverence for life" in the words of Albert Schweitzer. Indeed, we often seem determined to destroy each other—and the environment that supports our very existence—in the name of "growth," technological "progress,"—even of religion.

At the same time, we are clearly living in a transition period when the potential for change and transformation is tremendous. This instant, this lightening flash in the five billion year old history of God's ongoing creation, is so complex, so rich in potential, so interrelated in all its psychological, biological, cosmological, and spiritual modes of being, that everything each one of us thinks and says and does can make a significant difference in the quality of life and the future of our species on planet Earth.

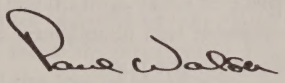
Surely, there has never been a more challenging or exciting time to be alive and never has the practice of prayer and meditation been more essential for our individual, societal and planetary salvation.

Through prayer and meditation we can reconnect with the wisdom and compassion and loving kindness that are at the heart of our true nature. We can once again see, and feel, and deeply experience our interrelatedness with each other and with every strand in the web of life. We can reignite our passion for loving and caring for each other and all that God created. In her book, *States of Grace*, Charlene Spretnak describes how she feels on emerging from an intensive meditation retreat:

> There they were again: the mindstates that arise when mind is in a relatively pure condition—cleansed of fear, anger, craving, ill will, and such—in which the natural world is perceived as surprisingly vivid and won-

drous. Gratitude and celebration indeed fill the mind, frequently and when least expected. One feels brimming over with thankfulness and joy for life on Earth.

December is surely a season for such celebration. A time to get in touch again with the good will and loving kindness of our true nature. As Buddhism's *Life Prolonging Kannon Sutra* says, "Our true nature is Eternal, Joyous, Selfless and Pure." So let our prayer and meditation this month be *Joy to the world*! May love and peace be in us and between us and "all our relations," as Native Americans say, meaning everything in God's creation. Merry Christmas, Shalom, and God bless!



Paul Walsh

Baba Virsa Singh Ji, a Sikh by birth who refers to Moses and Jesus, Muhammed and Buddha as often as to the ten Sikh Gurus—can usually be found on a farm in northern India, hard at work in a labor of love which must be one of the most effective ministries in the world.

A deeply spiritual man who radiates love, Baba Virsa began his work about 25 years ago with the simple observation that the suffering he saw all around him was due to poverty, and there was poverty because people had no work. Determined to do something to help, he got hold of a large piece of rocky land on the outskirts of New Delhi which the Indian government had abandoned as "barren" and he resolved to make it grow food for the poor.

He went to work in the way people have in India for millennia, plowing the fields by hand behind a bullock team. He tried, with tremendous difficulty at first, to persuade the poor to farm the land with him and grow their own food. No one helped, but because he was preaching the power of faith and love with the same fervor he devoted to his strenuous manual labor, Baba Virsa gradually gained the reputation of a "holy man", a saint who was giving his life to help others. Little by little, people came, often just to be near him, and joined in the work—using primitive farm implements, overcoming mountainous obstacles, and following the demanding lifestyle of "Babaji," as their beloved leader has come to be known.

The results have been almost miraculous. Supposedly barren lands turned into bountiful flowering fields and unbelievably productive farms. Babaji and his disciples ended up with far richer harvests than most commercial farms and far more food than they could possibly consume.

The poor in this small part of the world are no longer poor. Under the leadership of this loving, determined man, they have learned to meet their own material, social, and spiritual needs. And despite the simplicity of their rugged way of life, which still offers no modern conveniences, they think of themselves as wealthy.

A communal center, an ashram called Gobind Sadan now houses

For information about Gobind Sadan or Gobind Sadan USA, write to Gobind Sadan USA, Box 383, Graves Road, Central Square, New York 13036.

about 40 workers. Sustaining the hard lifestyle at Gobind Sadan, constantly renewing everyone's strength and commitment and motivation, is a rich program of prayer and meditation beginning in the middle of the night and continuing all day long. One lovely Indian prayer which takes 20 minutes to recite can be heard on the fields seven times a day.

For 25 years, a sacred fire has burned 24 hours a day at Gobind Sadan, and God's Spirit is a palpable presence. Pilgrims come from all over the world in broken-down buses and expensive cars, by bicycle and on foot, looking for inspiration or wanting to help. People of different castes and classes who once would not associate with one another now pray and work together.

Baba Virsa Singh is a ray of hope for the future of humanity on planet earth. He has successfully tackled two of the most life-threatening and pressing problems on our planet: poverty and the loss of fertile soul. In his own humble way, he has put people to work and grown food out of dust—which shows not only that it can be done, but that the religious message of prayer and service can provide a powerful incentive. May more and more people carry out what Babaji sees as the major purpose of religion: "to help souls and lands develop."

Mary Ford-Grabowsky

Mary Pat Fisher

Baba Virsa Singh in the fields where nothing would grow.

This Holiday Season Give the Gift of "Wisdom, Love, Goodness, and Joy."

Those gifts come in each issue of *Fellowship in Prayer*, writes Tod Broderick, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Many of our readers feel the same way. That's why we suggest *Fellowship in Prayer* as a most thoughtful and loving gift to friends, family, and loved ones in celebration of the holy season that will soon be with us.

Just print their names and addresses and send the list, along with your check, ($16 per subscription/$22 outside USA) in the envelope inserted in the middle of this issue. A gift card will be sent announcing your gift of *Fellowship in Prayer*, which will begin with the February issue.

When A Happy Thing Falls

ALEXANDER McCURDY III

"The mysteries of loss . . . open vistas obtained in no other way."

Some thirty years ago now, shortly after my ordination as an Episcopal Priest, I was called to officiate at the funeral of a young child. I remember a particular moment in the burial service when I read the words from the prayer book service which say: "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away; Blessed be the Name of the Lord." As I read aloud these biblical words, with grieving parents listening, I knew then, that at least I for one did not understand those concluding words, "Blessed be the Name of the Lord," at all. That was, of course, troubling. There were reasons for my trouble. First of all, although I would have denied it at the time, I don't think I truly accepted the fact that life itself was something given, and therefore sadly, was also something which could be taken away again. As I fear is the case with many people, I harbored a very discreet and low volume sense of entitlement about life. It was *my* life, and I felt secretly that I owned it. Like, this is my life, my elbow, my head. How wrong I was! I didn't actually know that these things were not my deeded private property, but rather, extremely frail and fragile, time-limited and borrowed items. Now, to be sure that way of thinking for one, is going to cause heaps of trouble when you're brought face to face with the arbitrary removal of your supposedly sacrosanct, all paid-for, "this is mine, private property" life! But at the time of that funeral, as I said, my denial that I even harbored such inflated notions about my existence, kept such questions from my mind. What I knew I didn't understand, however, was how anyone could respond to the loss of life, especially that of a little child, with an expression of praise or blessing. That totally escaped me.

With time and experience, answers to this puzzle have begun to dawn on me. Loss can indeed have meaning far beyond the pain and suffering usually associated with it. This means that the god, the power, the nature or however you designate it, which is behind loss, must not be cursed only, but it can also be accepted. There is also an awareness, a conscious-

An Episcopal priest and Jungian analyst practicing in the Philadelphia area, Dr. Alexander McCurdy also lectures at Jefferson Medical College in the Department of Psychiatry. His article has been shortened, reluctantly, due to space considerations.

ness which can be attained, in which even loss itself can be blessed. In this spirit, I am learning that as a whole experience, loss and letting go of what is taken away is not merely a horror, but a gateway to new things, a lens through which things never imagined come into focus; a cornerstone of entirely new and unimagined realities. Loss, of course, may in certain situations be so devastating that it destroys our capacity to continue. As things can break in this existence, so can people. The pain of loss may exceed the capacities we have to bear it. If we break or threaten to collapse, that is not our fault; for truly, we can only do what our strengths allow us.

However, if loss does not destroy us, it may paradoxically become the cornerstone of deepened capacities to live, to hope, to attach and love. Jung always emphasized that light only arises out of shadow and darkness. A simple truth this, but being reminded of it helps in the understanding that attachment and loss are not two opposites. I hope perhaps to show some of you, and just remind many of you who have much experience already, that these two things, attachment and loss, are complementary aspects of a third thing, whose name is known best by philosophers, theologians and poets.

When we can re-vision loss in this way, such insight enables us to perform the paradoxical act of letting go of what we love, rendering it back to whatever source we believe it emanated from, as we struggle, and pray and even as we scream at Almighty God or at whatever, begging that we not lose what we love. Loss re-visioned then, no longer confronts us as if it were a final barrier; rather it reveals itself to be a very dark, and surely mysterious passage way. Sensing that possibility, we may gradually learn to face our impending losses learning to let go and to make sacred our attachments in sacrifice instead of only cursing and clutching onto the things and people we love in life. The ultimate act of this surrender and sacrifice in the face of loss comes at the time of death.

For when someone can see loss, even the ultimate loss of life, as the seed-bed, as the unlikely prerequisite for deep attachment, a new consciousness has formed in such a person, a consciousness which perceives new things. When this consciousness is not present, however, loss and suffering cannot be seen through. Neurotic structures are built out of these attempts to circumvent the experience of loss and its pain. Basically, many of our neurotic structures are adaptations made by the psyche to shield us from the pains of loss. These defensive shields, the cores of our neuroses, I want to discuss first before turning to a more thorough

consideration of the consciousness which is able to see through loss as only something negative and horrible, to the mysteries of loss which open vistas obtained in no other way.

> Once we truly care for another person, the potential for real existential suffering is at our door.

Attaching, Loving, Caring, and Falling

Being lovingly and deeply attached to another human being is one of the greatest goals and joys of this existence. But as we all know very well, attaching and loving are fraught with many problems, so much so that not a few despair of ever attaching profoundly. What are the important issues in attaching, at least about the kind of attachment which in its highest form is called love? In this love, real friendship or attachment, the person is truly able to recognize the other person or thing for what he, she or it is, in its individuality. One's own unconscious material is not projected excessively onto the loved one, transferred as we say, and the attachment is established and maintained on the basis of perceiving a real person, not manipulated by our unconscious fantasies. This might be called the most differentiated type of attachment. In the lingo of psychoanalysis, we enter into object relations.

Certainly, the most primitive forms of attachment appear at birth with the child bonding to its mother. The infant appears almost greedy in its attachment, making it hard to speak of love at this point. The quality of this early attachment is based on the very necessary survival needs of the child. Merger and symbiosis are normal and necessary. Later in life, too much of this prevents relationship and sets one up for a disaster when the loss of the person merged with occurs.

Naturally, even in our adult attachments, some of our needs for attention, for admiration, for supplies of love and affirmation are relics of this early infantile egotism and are critical to our emotional survival. More happens with time of course. Under the best circumstances the little infant in us develops to know and recognize itself as the particular person it is. Likewise, other people are also seen for who they are and are liked or disliked. We become attached. We care. We love. We want to give and receive from these people. We are nurtured by these people. We commit. We surrender in these attachments; we give away something of ourselves

Brooks Walsh

into the keeping of the other person. That person's nature and that person's existence as we know it, holds something of us. It's like a root of our human tree, entwines in the other and becomes intricately involved in the essences of the other being. We love and we are attached . . . and we are vulnerable.

All along as this happens, we are opening the door wider and wider, opening it ever more inexorably to the experience of loss. No question about it: once a person enters into attachment, loss will be experienced sooner or later. The opposite is also true, however: No attachment, no loss. No question about that either. Some people need to choose this path. There are concrete experiential reasons for such things, some of which could be documented by the fly on the wall of the baby in its room growing up. Series of small disappointments build up into a traumatization of the experience of attachment. Millions of tiny moments of loss add up. Such people can no longer tolerate any loss, having lost the emotional where-with-all to stand it. They have been bruised too much or their capacity to endure the sum of the many micro-moments of pain is exceeded. The classic film from the 60's "Hiroshima, Mon Amour," is a study in this excess of woundedness in adults, in the ego's struggling not to attach again after terrible loss, over against the fervent desire of the soul indeed to attach and love again.

A fairly common defensive reaction to the threat of loss of attachment is egotism, of course. There are many other neurotic maneuvers, engaged in by us all at one time or another, but more so by those who are not able to bear the pain of loss. Sometimes a schizoid situation dominates in which no attachment beyond the occasionally instinctual or visceral occurs. There is not much of a personal dimension to such attachments, thus there is little pain when they are lost. A one-sided Pan-like energy is typical here. The animal dominates. Our goat- or Nymph-likeness is running the psychological show.

Another neurotic structure which enables the avoidance of attachment and loss occurs when we unconsciously inflate our threatened egos. Feeling frail and inadequate, a neurotic sense of god-likeness is meant to compensate for this. Gods aren't supposed to lose anything. These types of neurotic structures have a Dionysian flavor to them. In alcohol, drugs and false ecstasies, flight from our human condition is attempted. In intoxication and orgiastic bliss one endeavors to extinguish the darkness of loss. But there is always a hangover. Inflation and god-likeness have us in their grips whenever we attempt to deny our human limitations and

realities by imagining that we are so much better or worse, smarter or dumber than we really are.

> . . . attachment and loss are not two opposites . . . (they) are complementary aspects of a third thing, whose name is best known by philosophers, theologians, and poets.

A more deflated expression of god-likeness is found in the bizarre attempt to extinguish the pain of loss by plunging ahead into pain and loss. The unconscious decision is made to fly ahead into pain instead of away from it, and we become masochistic. Pandora dominates, the negative is always coming, but no word can be uttered which will stop it. Some forms of masochism and other forms of self-destructive behavior are based on this. Hemingway compensated for his dread of death and loss in his fascination with bullfighting. His suicide, the self-created loss of life, was his final, deflated, and tragic response to the pain of loss. Looking at it from the angle of inflation, we see that unwittingly he had become god-like; the almighty creator/terminator of life.

In true existential suffering, it is human realities, the human condition itself, which provide the suffering. For example, taking the example of attaching and loving; once we do this, once we truly care for another person, the potential for real existential suffering is at our door. Parents who love their children know this, husbands who love their wives, friends who love their friends know this. There are light, happy and wonderful moments to be sure, but there will inevitably be dark and painful moments too.

Neurotic suffering is different from this because it is based on maneuvers our minds make to avoid getting into the hard realities of life. Or, the defensive maneuvers of the mind try to give us just the good without the bad. But there is no high without low. This is reality, In real suffering, reality is not filtered and avoided. It is met.

The Meaning of Loss and Suffering

As I turn now to speak about the meaning real loss and suffering can lead to, I would conclude this section by pointing out that neurotic suffering is ultimately a hopeless sort of condition. I don't mean it is hopeless to remove the suffering based on neuroses. That is a major part of the daily

work in Jungian analysis and central to other forms of psychotherapy. But when I do say that neurotic suffering is "hopeless suffering" I mean that the net result of this suffering, where it leads, is to dead ends and frustrations, not to a discovery of meaning, not even mystery. There is nothing redemptive about neurotic suffering. It is not a suffering which leads to deeper insights, nor does it open any doors. If it were, we'd have quite a host of wise people in this world. Only when we are able to move through and beyond our neurotic sufferings to a naked encounter with the realities of life, including genuine human suffering, will the doors to meaning at least appear before for us. Even suffering genuinely by itself won't open the doors to wisdom, but without it there is no hope whatsoever of finding meaning in pain and loss.

Take Job for example. His suffering is real. It is based on real losses, real isolation and real despair, real sickness. His life had been a full one, so the story goes. He loved and was greatly blessed. He was also an exceptionally good man. Then, everything he had was lost. All he was attached to was gone. His loves gone, his health gone, his life plunged into misery. The story tells us that Yahweh indeed permits these losses to occur. When God finally responds to Job's question as to why this misery and loss have been visited upon him, the response from God is but a chastening remark to man's presumptuousness and inflation.

Although Job receives no explanation for the losses and suffering, he learns that humility, silence and waiting represent true wisdom. He is reminded graphically of how little man knows and how vast are the things that lie beyond our comprehensive. Job has an encounter with God which moves him to say at the end, while yet in the pain of loss:

> I know that thou canst do all things
> and that no purpose is beyond thee.
> But I have spoken of great things
> which I have not understood,
> things too wonderful for me to
> know.
> I knew of thee then only by report
> but now I see thee with my own eyes.
> Therefore I melt away;
> I repent in dust and ashes.

At the beginning, I spoke of the subtle and sometimes not so subtle inflations we humans can have about ourselves, our bodies and our lives in terms of a false sense of ownership, of entitlement, of god-likeness which

Kay Danielson

betrays our psychological kinship of Icarus. Job, the good and righteous man, is purged of this grandiosity and reminded of his limits. He recalls that true wisdom begins with the fear of God. He is quiet, does not speak, and is able to wait.

I would point out one more thing, something that is often left out when speaking of the story of God and Job. In the end, Job's fortunes and loves are all restored and multiplied. The ultimate issue of the terrible losses suffered are an increase of blessing. Loss has been lived through to blessing. Loss, it can be said, has been the harbinger of blessing not dreamt of previously. I believe this is the great secret behind the mystery of suffering and loss.

I remember not so long ago, when I was in the grips of terrible grief, misery and loss, a dear friend and a physician, a Jew who had married his love who was a Palestinian, said to me words I barely heard then, but more clearly understand now. "Alex, there is misery; . . . and things get worse and worse and worse. And then . . . the Glory." That is a mysterious truth, echoed again in Rainer Maria Rilke's final words of the "Tenth Duino Elegy":

> Then we, who think of rising happiness,
> would feel the emotion
> that almost confounds us
> when a happy Thing falls.

These words can mean nothing but foolishness to anyone who has not discovered that attaching and letting go are not opposites. It is a paradox. Only those who have been able to attach, who have then learned even to lose and let go, understand that rising happiness may occur indeed, when a happy thing falls. The ancient Jew knew about this when he or she wrote: "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; Blessed be the Name of the Lord."

Rock Ritual XIV: The Navajos' Wanderings

ROBERT O'ROURKE

There is a lonely-quiet-spiritual place in New Mexico . . . Bosque Redondo. A place of suffering for the Navajo Nation. In the early 1860s thousands of Navajo people were forced to leave their "beautiful land" for this desolate reservation marked by alkali flats and the brackish-black waters of the Pecos River. This unhappy event is remembered in history as "The Long Walk." Hundreds of *Dineh*, "the people," died along the trail from cold March winds, dysentery and starvation. When they arrived at their destination, soldiers prodded the survivors with bayonets and herded them into adobe-walled enclosures where they were forced to live in dug-outs covered with woven grass mats: their only protection from snow and rain. The food provided them was condemned as unfit for soldiers. Their only water supply was the foul-tasting water from the river. Thousands more died!

Finally, in 1868, General Sherman recognized the desperation and agony of these people and ordered them sent home . . . back to the lands of the Colorado River, the Chuska Mountains, and Canyon de Chelly. On their return journey Chief Manuelito told of seeing the distant mountains. "We felt like talking to the ground, we loved it so and some of the old men and women cried."*

The Navajo have never forgotten those terrible days and those who died in a strange land and "crossed over to the spirit world." From the arroyas, mountains and canyons of their homeland they have gathered rocks and stones and carried them back to this place of imprisonment. There they have placed the rocks in a mound. A tribute to ones-once-loved. An appropriate gesture. Rocks are permanent. Forever. Like unforgotten memories.

* The Navajos' love of their land is beautifully expressed in this old chant: "The mountains, I become part of it . . . The herbs, the fir tree, I become part of it. The morning mists, the clouds, the gathering waters, I become part of it. The wilderness, the dew drops, the pollen . . . I become part of it."

A writer, poet, and sculptor, Bob O'Rourke resides in Colorado. The illustration accompanying his article is by Lisa Smith, an artist and sculptor of Spirit Rocks.

Lisa Smith

The nation of Israel and the wandering tribes of the Sinai long ago established a similar rock ritual of remembrance . . . a gesture of leaving a small rock at the graves of their people. A way to say, "I was here. I remember you. We will meet again. Goodbye."

Two nations . . . separated by land and ocean . . . yet linked by the common bond of death and grief. Two rituals. More enduring than flowers. Persistent! Like the spirit of a people.

In Memoriam

With deep regret we report the death of our beloved colleague and friend, Dr. James T.C. Liu. Husband, father, long-time professor at Princeton University and trustee and vice president of Fellowship in Prayer, he was a valued spiritual friend and teacher to all who knew him. He will be sorely missed.

The World Parliament of Religions: 1883 and 1993

PATRICK CONNOR

Paul Walsh, Mary Ford-Grabowsky, and Linda Baumann represented Fellowship in Prayer *at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago this summer. Like the author of this article, they felt great joy and excitement as hope mounted for a world united around the values that all religions and spiritualities cherish, like justice, wisdom, trust and compassion.*

> As a Hindu reads Christian history, it is full of cruelty such as to shock the Hindu mind. Shootings, lynchings, the roasting of negroes alive fill the American papers. How has America treated the Indian and the buffalo? What became of Australia's aborigines? Who burned people at the stake and invented torture machines? Christian nations are the most aggressive and intolerant.

So spoke Rao Talang, a Hindu Brahmin and delegate from India to the first World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893.

Talang personified in himself what was probably the most significant feature of the Parliament, whose one hundredth anniversary was celebrated August 28 through September 4, 1993, in Chicago with another meeting of the Parliament: the clash of Christianity with the religions of Asia. For the first time in history Americans were exposed, in 1893, to articulate spokesmen for the non-Christian religions of the world. As can be seen from Talang's words, it was not always a happy experience!

Of all the Asians, Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu from India, made the most impact. (His influence on the Parliament reminds one of the influence Belgium's Cardinal Suenens had at the second Vatican Council). At the opening of the Parliament, on September 11, 1893, Vivekananda, clad in a red robe and a yellow turban, brought the audience of 4000 to its feet with his greeting: "Sisters and Brothers of America!" After the Parliament ended the Swami stayed on in the U.S. and brought the

A Roman Catholic priest and a noted author and lecturer, Pat Connor is also the founder of ARC (Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church). For information about ARC, you may contact Fr. Connor through the Duchesne Center at Stuart Country Day School in Princeton, NJ 08545, (609)921-2338.

teachings of The Vedanta to Americans. At 1993's Parliament there were seven papers given on Vivekananda's thought. His influence endures.

It should be said here that the first Parliament was held during the Columbian Exhibition—or World's Fair—in Chicago. This extravaganza was held to commemorate Columbus' "discovery" of the Americas in 1492. Indeed the impetus for the Parliament came from American Christians who argued that it was not enough to show to the world the dazzling advances American science and industry had made—the spiritual advances of the human race should also be celebrated—especially the superiority of Christianity over all other religions. (For supporters of the Temperance Movement, the fact that Chicago had 5000 saloons was an added incentive.)

The World's Fair was meant to show also that America was a great civilization. Signs of this could be seen in some of the Fair's exhibits: the world's first zipper, the first automobile, the first fibre-glass—not to mention a life-size knight made of prunes and a performance by Buffalo Bill.

For its part the World Parliament of Religions represented the beginning of the U.S.'s becoming a religiously pluralistic society. Until 1893 Americans had seen themselves as a largely Protestant nation. Now Roman Catholics and Jews were ready for a place at the table—and, post 1893, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and the like were also inviting themselves to the party. No wonder one writer was moved to say about the first parliament: "In the twenty Councils of the Christian Church, from 325 A.D. to Vatican Council I in 1870, no such sight has been vouchsafed to human eyes." Moreover, with the advent of Asian religions into the U.S., Americans had to take another look at the meaning of religious liberty. Did it, for example, imply the equality of all religions?

The first Parliament began with the sounding of ten strokes of the Columbian Liberty Bell, ten being the number of the major religious traditions of the world. Then began the procession of dignitaries, led by Cardinal Gibbons, "magnificent in robes of red." Then came Mrs. Potter Palmer and Mrs. Charles Henrotin. From the start women had a prominent place in the proceedings: one address was entitled: "What did Phoebe do?" Behind the women came a procession of colorfully-dressed representatives of the world's religions, including a lone representative of The Salvation Army. Conspicuously absent were the Archbishop of Canterbury—he didn't approve of the whole business—and the Sultan

Tom Dunham

of Turkey. When the dignitaries were all in their places Cardinal Gibbons called for the mass recitation of The Lord's Prayer, named for the occasion, so as to not offend the sensibilities of the non-Christians, "The Universal Prayer."

From that moment on, for the next eighteen days, there ensued an orgy of speech-making on subjects like: "Religious System of the Pareses", "Confucianism", "The Divine Element of the Weekly Rest-Day," "Protestant Missions in Turkey," "The Catholic Church and the Bible," "Christ the Unifier of Mankind".

Many Americans had hoped that the meeting with Asian religions would signal the beginning of a universal reign of peace, with the religions of the world cooperating for that end. Other Americans thought a universal natural religion would come to pass. For still others it seemed that the conversion of the world to Christianity was imminent. Vivekananda poured icy water on that idea:

> Do I wish that the Christian become Hindu? God forbid! Or that the Hindu or Buddhist become Christian? God forbid! If anyone hopes that religious unity can be obtained by the triumph of any one of these religions and the destruction of others, to him I say: Brother, yours is an

impossible hope! If the Parliament has proved anything to the world it is that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possession of any one church and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character!

"Towards a civilization with a heart: A fitting goal for the religions of the world!"

Catholic participation in the Parliament was orchestrated by Bishop John Keane, rector of The Catholic University of America. For his pains he was dismissed by "Rome" from his post at CUA, and Pope Leo XIII issued a document forbidding Catholics ever again to take part in such religiously "promiscuous" assemblies as the World Parliament of Religions—which came to a close with 7000 people singing Cardinal Newman's "Lead Kindly Light"!

Pope Leo's strictures no longer apply, as is clear when you examine the list of names of those who participated in the second World Parliament: Cardinal Bernardin, Hans Kung, Rosemary Ruether and a representative from the Vatican, Archbishop F. Gioia. Mother Teresa planned to come, but was prevented by illness at the last moment.

The second Parliament set as its goals to commemorate the first Parliament, to promote inter-faith understanding, to celebrate the diversity of the world's religions, and to work out strategies whereby the world's religions can attack the problems plaguing the global community. Not the least of these is inter-religious hatred, which has dug millions of graves since the first parliament recessed. 6500 representatives of an estimated 125 religious groups attended the second Parliament.

How the religious landscape of the U.S. has changed since 1893! There are now 1000 mosques in the U.S.; in Catholic Boston there's a Hindu temple to the goddess Lakshmi; thousands of Chinese-American Buddhists annually visit the Hsi Lai Buddhist temple in Los Angeles. Today there are more Muslims in the U.S. than there are Episcopalians! High on the agenda of the second Parliament was the discussion of how Americans can best deal with this new religious pluralism and how best to initiate and foster inter-religious dialogue.

If this new pluralism would have baffled the participants at the first Parliament think how puzzled they would have been at the titles of some

Tom Dunham

of the lectures given at the second Parliament: "The Return of the Goddess: Ecology, Spirituality, and Partnership;" "Native American Spirituality;" "The American Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on AIDS;" "Roman Catholicism and Genetic Engineering;" "Ecofeminism and the Return of the Female Principle;" "Resiliency and the African-American Community" (an especially significant title, since African-Americans were virtually excluded from the first Parliament; they were equated with heathenism and low culture).

One thing we can be sure of, in this blessedly ecumenical age, we shall not hear any echoes of a speech given at the first Parliament by the Rev. Wilkinson. Said he: "The Christian's attitude towards other religions must be universal, eternal, unappeasable hostility!" For these words he was publicly rebuked by the gentle Julia Ward Howe, composer of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." The gracious Unitarian Julia would be pleased with the more open and tolerant attitude prevailing at the second Parliament. Perhaps she would have made sure to not miss the talk given on September 1, 1993: "Towards a Civilization with a Heart," A fitting goal for the religions of the world!

"No world peace without peace among the world's religions!"

Still unattained is the goal urged upon the delegates of the first Parliament by its organizer, C. C. Bonney: "When the religious faiths recognize one another as brothers, as children of the one Father, then will the nations of the world yield to the spirit of concord and learn war no more." 1993 delegate Hans Kung put it more trenchantly: "No world peace without peace among the world's religions!" Reason enough to have reconvened the World Parliament of Religions—in Chicago in 1993.

*Neilah**

George Hower

Whenever I think of the summer,
I remember You . . .
It was the first time we really met.

Yes, we'd met before—but really not
face to face.
You led me here, to the desert.
In ancient times, You called the people
Israel, Your bride.
This was where You were wed:
I still hear the voices.

I was diving in the clear blue water, chasing rainbows of fishes that teased my fingers and fled my touch.
Tanned and brown, laughing and singing, friendship bloomed in the deserts of Dahab and Nuayba.
We drank gallons of water and never seemed to sweat,
We bragged we were sleeping in a 1000 star hotel under Your sky.
By Ras Muhammed, You had claimed me.

You called me into the mountains, so bare and desolate,
So private that the only sound was the whisper of love.
Yes, we talked at the Kotel, the Western Wall, and
We met furtively in the old city.
Sometimes I catch a glimpse of You here and there . . .
But always when I think of the Sinai, You are here with me.

You lured me there, with Your voice, the *Bat Kol*.
She led me there with her face veiled like a Bedouin woman.

* *Neilah* is a special prayer service in Judaism that comes at the end of the Day of Atonement; it refers to the closing of the gates of heaven at the conclusion of a time of judgment.

Rabbi Patricia Philo ("Patti"), serves the Sonoma County Synagogue Center in Rohnert Park, CA. She and her husband, Rabbi David Kopstein, travel as often as they can to Israel and to foreign Jewish communities.

I journeyed in to You, through the valleys . . .
would a burning bush be a surprise?
Not here.
A desert, dry and timeless, without age, without decay,
touches the sea, so clear and deep,
cool and full of life.

Yes, You claimed me.
You changed me.
You will never release Your hold upon my soul.
I was one of those You wed so long ago.
Bat Sinai, daughter of Sinai,
Remember me now.
Patricia Philo

Notice to our Readers

The prayer translated from Hebrew by David Cooper, which appeared in the October, 1993 edition of *Fellowship in Prayer* was reprinted from *Or Chadash* (New Light) A Handbook for Prayer and Celebration, published by P'nai Or, a division of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal. The full prayer book is available from ALEPH, 7318 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19119.

The Late Christmas Visitor

MARSHALL MYERS

Please send the story of your own "transforming experience" to the Editor, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542. You need not be a professional writer. Just describe a spiritual experience that made a difference in your life or in someone else's life.

It really didn't seem like Christmas Eve. Outside, the wind whipped circles of dust into miniature whirlwinds, but since the temperature hovered around thirty-five degrees a winter coat soon soothed the sting of winter's chill. The lights of an occasional car interrupted the silence of a city biding its time until Christmas was over and people could get back into the routine of making a living.

When I opened the church doors, the blast of warm air seemed to temporarily erase the loneliness of a man whose family was scattered somewhere else, close to their own home fires, involved with their own families, making their own family traditions. The pain of divorce, like a winter chill, eases some when you are gathered around a caring community of Christians, something I really needed that particular Christmas night.

As a usher, I was seated snugly in the back of the sanctuary, at the moment awed by both how sublime and inscrutable this season was. How could I ever understand this incarnation of God into a poor, peasant family from Nazareth? Wouldn't it make more sense, I thought to myself, if God were made human and thrust into some family of royalty so that the sheer majesty of His (that)(God's) presence was surrounded by all the ambience of wealth and power?

Suddenly, I heard shuffling out in the vestibule. Somebody was coming in late and I needed to seat this worshiper in the least disturbing manner. I peeked through the doors in anticipation, quickly looking over my shoulder to see where to put this tardy arrival. What I saw was a bedraggled man, withered by the winter air in a light, thin jacket, shiv-

A freelance writer in Indiana, Marshall Myers says that he "teaches and continues to learn" at the University of Louisville.

ering while he tried to scrawl his name in the visitor's registry. He looked up at me and smiled boldly, probably unsure of what my reaction would be to his presence. He had left the street that evening seeking somewhere to find a place for himself, if not for the night, then at least for a long enough time for him to forget the cold, dark night.

When he looked up at me, his face glimmered in the soft lights. I could see the countenance of a man in his mid-thirties whose stooped shoulders and wrinkled body belied his age.

I seated him in the back pew. He thanked me as he fumbled first with the bulletin and then with the hymnal. Several times, when I looked over at him, he seemed confused, wondering, maybe, if he had made the right choice of where to come in out of the raw weather.

Perhaps, he had never been a worship service quite like this one. He often looked around trying awkwardly to figure out what he was supposed to do by trying to catch a glimpse or just what page other worshipers were on.

Tom Dunham

Later in the service, as was our custom, all the ushers came forward to the alter to catch fire from the advent candle and to pass the flame to the congregation who sat clutching their small white candles.

When I reached our late visitor, I suddenly realized that in my haste and impatience, I had forgotten to give him a candle. As I passed by him, I noticed a quizzical look on his face. He seemed to be asking with his eyes just what were we all doing.

Now the sanctuary glowed from the soft light of those many tapers, signifying the Christ who had come into the world to bring to the suffering earth an illumination few of us could really understand. To my left, I saw someone offer the visitor a lit candle which the visitor took eagerly. A smile spread across his face and he beamed as though he now understood what we all were doing. These candles meant something to him, and he seemed bursting to share this revelation to those around him.

After the benediction, I saw him headed toward me, the candle still swirling grey smoke. I thought: What do we have here? Is this poor soul going to ask me for money for a meal? How much would I give him? I guess, more than anything else, I feared the embarrassment he might put me through.

Instead, he grabbed me with both arms and hugged me tightly, whispering in my ear in a joyous declaration: "Even street people know God."

As I started out of the church that holy night, I suddenly realized that truly the visitor knew more than I about the mystery of this night. He, indeed, understood the cold of that December night so many, many years ago. He understood, too, that in this world this evening, for him, there was no room in the inn, either; but, in spite of it all, he still loved God. He realized, more than I, just what all those lit candles meant. I turned around to thank him for what he taught me that raw winter night, but when I looked over at him he was busy spreading his joy to others in the congregation, shaking hands, and smiling till his eyes seemed like tiny slits.

As my feet hit the pavement outside the church that evening I turned up my collar to the same wind that had reminded me only an hour ago of the biting sting of loneliness. Now, thanks to the late visitor, I better understood the depth and majesty of another chilly night nearly two thousand years ago.

Granddad and the Red Flashlight

ANITA WHEATCROFT

With the brush-stroke of an artist, Anita Wheatcroft paints a strong and broad bridge across the generation gap.

"The Special Needs of the Elderly."

"What are they and how can we help meet them?"

Having volunteered to talk to our Church's Pastoral Care Group, I was groping for a focus from my own trial-and-error experiences with my parents, in-laws, and other elderly persons I'd visited over recent years. My vocation is clergy wife, teacher of children, and free-lance writer. Some 15 years ago, this extra calling suddenly became mine through accident, necessity, and mostly God's mysterious design. Far from being an expert, I myself get reverse education: "Do the job first; learn and prepare for it afterward." Unexpectedly I have grown and received, and continue to receive, far greater rewards than I ever dreamed possible.

However, trying to share these varied learnings, despite long experience and much research was overwhelming. One clear spring morning I saw that all I had done after weeks of work and reflection was to categorize four basic areas of need, which, I believe, are often present in our elderly population. I wrote—they tend to feel "*lonely, helpless, out of control*, and their lives seem *meaningless* to them." Yet how to meet those needs? No sure, ready answer emerged.

A glance at the calendar afforded a welcome interruption in my thoughts. It spurred me to make a quick shopping trip for a birthday card for our grandson, Albert. Pouring over the limited selection available for a high school boy, I was carried back in memory to his birth and our joy over our first grandchild! Then, unbidden, another memory, one I've never shared before, emerged with clarity. Only afterward, back at my desk, did I realize how it pertained to my reflections on the elderly.

A widely published writer in religion and spirituality, Anita Wheatcroft lives in Texas.

On the morning after Albert's fourth birthday, I awoke at dawn. Hearing a noise in the kitchen, I slipped quietly into my robe and joined the small boy sitting at the kitchen window, where he was engrossed in watching birds darting to and from the feeder, listening to their songs.

It was the celebration of Albert's birthday that had brought him, his parents, and the new baby to visit us in Houston. His enchanting sister, born that year, had divided attention previously focused on Albert alone, and this birthday needed to be a festive occasion. The family's hurried, three-day visit was at a busy time of year and included a trip to the nursing home to see my father, who was paralyzed, bedridden, and according to the doctor, "failing fast."

No one spoke of this, but we were keenly aware that this might be Albert's last visit with his great-grandfather. The visit had gone well, though we feared we'd over-tired my father with conversation and forced cheerfulness. Because I knew Great-Granddad and Albert had a special bond, I regretted the visit, for it had been far too short.

The rest of the family still slept, perhaps having been up often in the night with the baby. Today they had a long drive back to Louisiana.

While Albert and I shared conversation and breakfast, a sudden, wild idea came to me. Vainly I tried to dismiss it and savor this precious time for myself alone. "Share it," the inner voice persisted. We could slip off, just the two of us, drive to the nursing home and have a quick visit with Granddad before the others awoke and packed to leave.

Albert was delighted with the conspiracy. Whisked off like that, riding along nearly deserted streets in the early morning, were high adventure to him. He'd brought his most cherished birthday gift to share with his great-granddad, a small red plastic flashlight. Other gifts included clothes we'd carefully selected for kindergarten, a ball from his cousins, beautiful books, and the new tricycle his parents had transported, still store-wrapped, all the way from Louisiana. All were passed over for the flashlight.

Pushing open the heavy doors of the skilled-care wing of Golden Age Manor, I braced myself, as always, for the assault: the odors and the wail and plaintive outcries that, even with weekly visits, I'd not learned to take for granted. These, I knew, were part of any such home for the elderly. I knew there was also the committed, loving care often present among the aides and nurses there.

Despite the early hour, there were a few of the regulars in the lobby,

waiting for medication and breakfast. Sadie with her long gray braids, looking like a ragdoll in her print robe, was crying, "Help me, help me," while Wilbur tapped on his wheelchair with his cane and scowled at everyone. Busy nurses, used to both, paid no attention.

"Wave at her," I told Albert, after he threw me a troubled look. Sadie quieted at once and waved back. Wilbur, his face warmed by some distant memory at seeing the small boy, broke into a toothless grin.

They tend to feel lonely, helpless, out of control and their lives seem meaningless to them.

Albert tugged on my hand, leading me along the corridor to his great-granddad's room. In an instant he'd scrambled up on the hospital bed and with small, soft arms encircled the gaunt neck of the limp man who once had been my strong, hard-working, capable father. Memories of camping vacation and his joking good humor came back to me. Now he lay, propped up, dressed in a too-big gown, with "Golden Age" stamped on its front, which made him look more frail than ever. Yet his brown eyes glowed with sudden recognition, and an instant smile transformed his haggard, pain-lined face.

"Guess what, Granddad. We had my *birthday* last night. Balloons and ice cream and cake."

The old man began the usual teasing banter he'd never be too sick to carry on. "Let's see. Your birthday, Albert. You're *two* years old, aren't you? Or is it *three*?"

"No, Granddad! *You* know I'm this many; *four*!" The little boy opened up one small hand, while holding down the thumb with the other, to prove it.

They were in their own world. Soon the room was filled with laughter and their free, happy talk. They kidded and chatted with each other about the nuisance of a new baby, the anticipated joys and fears of school, how Granddad's hospital bell turned on the light outside the door, and other subjects. Then Albert produced his prize, his red flashlight. Now old brown eyes lighted up with the same childlike delight as the young one's, which were so like them. Albert put the flashlight firmly into the bent, arthritic claw, closed the fingers of the hand, and showed where to press.

Beams of light shot suddenly round the room amid their laughter. Thelma, the huge black angel in white, paused as she folded laundry, to scold affectionately. "Turn that thing away from me, Mr. Lyon. You want to put my eyes out?"

But she and I exchanged thankful looks. We both knew how proud her patient was, at last, to be able to work something, to do anything, by himself. How often we'd prayed together, Thelma and I, for just this miracle. Albert, young as he was, sensed something too, and shared the old man's excitement. However, it was soon apparent that his great-granddad was not going to relinquish the flashlight, because he kept thanking Albert for it. Somehow he considered it his gift since he could work it.

Albert looked sad a moment, then shrugged characteristically. I avoided the questioning look he threw me, closed my eyes and prayed urgently instead.

Then a small voice said, "Oh, it's okay, Granddad. *You* keep it."

"Thelma, what do I have to give this big boy for *his* gift? Where are my cards?" The old man tried to pull himself up, but was too weak.

She brought a tray from the dresser of his cherished greeting cards. It struck me suddenly that, after eighty-four years of life, only three things still had meaning for him: his family photos, his large-print Bible, and his greeting cards.

He could still see well enough to distinguish the pictures on the cards. Now, however, examining them carefully, he discarded each one, dissatisfied. Suddenly he cried, "That's it. The one on the wall with my pictures. That's the one I was looking for."

Grumbling indulgently, the devoted aide shuffled over and took down the large, bright card taped up nearest his bed. It was a Disney-type panorama that folded up and popped out. Albert was delighted. All the characters he loved. He closed and opened the card over and over. Proudly he pointed to each character, naming them. Granddad was impressed and had him repeat them. Then a peaceful hush encircled them as they enjoyed their gifts and one another.

Strange exchange, I marveled, as Thelma left us to answer the bell down the hall. Then I broke the silence: "Albert, the rest of the family will be up wondering where we are. You have to leave town today."

It seemed a sacrilege, in a way, to break the spell of that magic circle of love, generosity, and mutual delight. Perhaps I was afraid one of them

Cliff Moore

would change his mind, or I would mar their joy by showing my tears, or both. So I hurried the affectionate departure. When we reached the doorway, my father grew wistful. "When will I see you again?"

"Oh, I'll be back again tomorrow, Dad," I assured him, but I knew that was not what he meant.

"And Granddad, *I'll* be back, too. Not for Easter, but after Easter. We'll have our *second Easter* here in Houston. Mama said so. So I'll see you soon."

My father responded, with his big smile, though his eyes brimmed behind his useless glasses. His voice wavered.

"That's right, Albert. See you soon, for Easter—for a *second Easter*."

"Soon." I reflected on that as we drove home. When would that be? It is tomorrow; it is eons away; it is forever. For little children time goes too slowly, especially before summer and holidays. For the elderly, it goes too fast and sometimes slips into oblivion, often with little meaning. Yet there *was* meaning and a unity in time for these two. Time has eternal value. I knew I'd witnessed a small miracle.

Strange-inappropriate gifts: for a dying man, a cheap, breakable, red flashlight. For a four-year old child, a bright greeting card of get well wishes, which he couldn't understand, from a family far away.

They did not see each other that spring, and never will again in this life. But there *is* a second Easter waiting for these two, so alike in warm generosity and love.

In their strange gift exchange, Albert and Granddad conveyed more than words to one another. Each spoke to the human needs which I now see are the same at the beginning of life, towards its end, or any time in between.

Their words and gestures said: Don't be lonely; don't feel helpless; don't feel your life is meaningless, because--

You are loved

You can still do something

You are needed by others in this world for what you and only you can be.

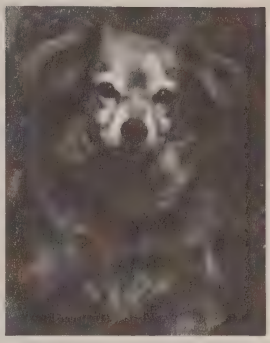
For each of my earlier questions, possibility and promise was revealed. New life was given in their gifts—to one another and to me.

Inappropriate gift exchange? Perhaps. Grace is always inappropriate.

It may come directly or through others, but its source is God. The God who gave us and continues to give us Life, the greatest gift of all.

Ask Angela

BARBARA ACKERMAN



Do you have a question of the heart or spirit that needs attention? Angela, our canine sage-in-residence, would love to help. Please write to her in care of FiP, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542, and she will give you her answer in our next issue.

Dear Angela,

I spend a lot of time rushing from one thing to another feeling hassled and frazzled. For all my racing, I don't seem to be getting more done, and I'm definitely not having more fun. Any thoughts you may have to share about this would be appreciated.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Rushed

Dear Rushed,

Thank you for taking time out from your busy schedule to write me about this important subject. I hope I can be of some help to you and all those like you who feel they are constantly racing against time.

I have noticed that human souls do seem to be rushing around a lot more these days. Where is all this hurry-up getting folks? Is someone giving away free dog biscuits somewhere? Is there an unguarded macaroni-and-cheese sauce container out there? I've noticed also that many humans don't seem happy about the hyped-up pace of their lives and that hurrying is taking its toll. Lots of tummyaches and headaches out there. Lots of fast-beating hearts, tension, crankiness, barkiness—all caused by pressure to move faster. Is there an antidote to all this rushing that I can offer? As a matter fact, I do know of something that can bring relief. The antidote is entering Dog-time. In Dog-time, there is a time for everything and everything has its time. In Dog-time, nothing gets done on time, but there are not consequences or penalties. Dog-time is the place where time is on your side, where time feels friendlier and racing against it unnecessary. Dog-time is a special time zone where the pace of life slows. Here we feel quiet, focused, and more receptive. Life feels more

manageable and pleasurable. Dog-time is the place where each of us may take our own sweet time. Experiencing Dog-time for merely ten minutes a day can leave a soul feeling more relaxed and centered, ready for the day's doings. What is the value of this? A slower heart rate, lower blood pressure, less stress, anger, and frustration, more contentedness, efficiency, and peace.

Canines can help humans be in Dog-time. It is one of our gifts to our companions. Scientific studies have shown that humans who stroke and talk to us lower their blood pressure and slow the heart. Any dog can be a good Dog-time teacher. We certainly have gotten a handle on this "time thing." Being in Dog-time is our natural way. Dogs are never late for dinner. Have you ever seen a dog rushing? Probably not. Dogs do not run late, and our list of things to do gets done. We dogs are basically efficiency experts who don't get hassled by time. We have learned to go with the flow.

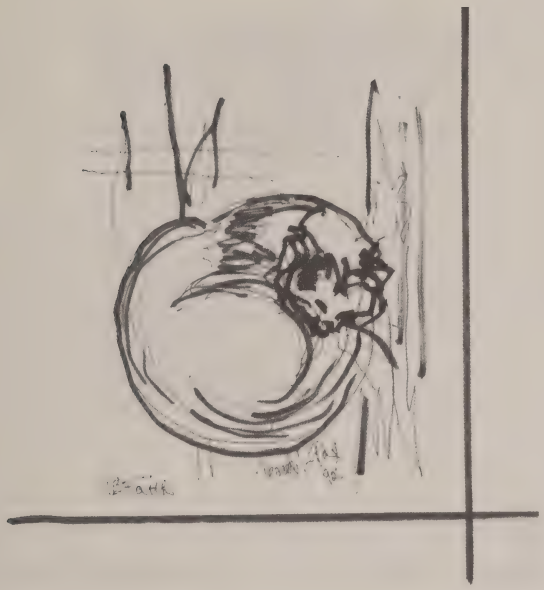
I know there are list-makers out there concerned that Dog-time is a place where nothing gets done. If you adore busy schedules, being in Dog-time does not stop one from having and enjoying them. I myself lead a very busy life with a full schedule. I get everything done on my To-Do list whenever I remember to make one, and I do it all in Dog-time. I have time for the things that are important to me, which includes time to do nothing, which is vital for my well-being. My schedule includes time to putter, prowl, ponder, pester a human, patrol for chicken, daydream, hide, bark, yowl, growl, greet, lick, nip, nap, snorkel, chew, and scratch. If I'm out for a walk with my buddy and she tries to rush me, I just plop myself down and become an unmovable obstruction. I know that a life of trying to catch up is wasteful and unnecessary.

For any of you who would like to be in Dog-time more often or more regularly, I suggest that you borrow a dog for a little while each week. Even a nervous mutt like myself can be a good teacher. You will see how difficult it is to race against time when you spend time with a dog.

For those of you who would like to be in Dog-time more often but don't know any dogs, I leave you with a short list of suggested activities that may be of help to you.

1. Take time to sniff.

Sniffing is a wonderful Dog-time activity. My suggestions for good sniffing include tree trunks, shrubs, flower beds, fire hydrants, utility



poles, bones, old socks, chicken, old yogurt containers, and used apples. Feel free to come up with your own favorite list. Do not underestimate the power of a walk/sniff for putting a soul in Dog-time. Most of my walks are merely meanderings between sniffs. After a good walk/sniff, I am always soothed by the timelessness of time.

2. Begin a collection of tennis balls or old bones.
3. Find a shady tree in a temperate climate and observe wildlife.
4. Stare down a squirrel.
5. Watch a cloud roll by.
6. Chew you nails or lick your paws.
7. Daydream.
8. Sigh deeply.
9. Count your Kibbles.
10. Meditate on chicken and cheese.

I hope these suggested activities are of use to anyone who tries them. To all those who feel rushed and frazzled, I wish you all more Dog-time.

Faithfully,
Angela

A Word About Silence

WILLIAM M. STEPHENS

Ram Dass, the author of many fine books on the spiritual life, wrote as follows of Meher Baba:

> *Meher Baba was an Indian holy man who was a very pure, pure statement of Bhakti Yoga, the Yoga of Devotion, the Yoga of Love . . . He left his body about a year ago (1969). He died. And to the extent that one reads his discourses and his books like* God Speaks *or* Listen Humanity! *with the openness of the fourth* chakra, *with love in one's heart, he is a very, very high teacher. There's no doubt about that. I've had very powerful spiritual contacts with Meher Baba and I feel that he is one of my gurus, one of the beings who guide my unfolding. He pointed out to me in correspondence, when he was in his body, that he thought that there was a problem in relation to LSD—that you became addicted to the experience of LSD rather than working for the true reality. I have come to understand what he meant by that over the years, as I've gone on in my own work. I feel that he's a very loving being who is there for people who can open their hearts to him.*

The author of this article follows the spiritual path taught by Meher Baba.

It gets harder and harder these days to find silence—complete silence. The world is becoming noisier and noisier, and there seems to be nothing we can do about it.

Of course, a special kind of silence is always available—the kind some of us find in prayer; in nature; in the euphoria that comes with sustained jogging or running. Some find it in a sunrise, a sonnet, a sonata; in watching the flight of a hummingbird . . . in music or in art. It can be found in church, on a mountain or even in prison.

Some who read these words are well aware of that inner silence we can experience in forgetting ourselves, reaching for the Higher Self . . . centering our consciousness . . . meditating on the One who lives in the heart. This inner silence has very little to do with religion, but everything to do with God.

Last July, in India, I experienced silence in a very special way. Two hundred miles east of Bombay, on Meherabad Hill, near the ancient city of Ahmednagar, is the *Samadhi* (tomb/shrine), of Avatar Meher Baba.

A practicing attorney and a writer widely published in a number of fields, Dr. William Stephens is a regular contributor to FiP.

Roger Stephens

Bill Stephens in India

Known widely as The Silent Master, Meher Baba passed away in 1969 after observing total silence for more than 44 years. My wife Peggy and I were at Meherabad on Silence Day, July 10, the annual observance of the day in 1925 when Meher Baba began his long period of silence.

"If my silence does not speak," Meher Baba told his *mandali* (close disciples), through his expressive hand gestures, "of what use would be words spoken by the tongue?" All the words have already been spoken, he said; it is now time for men and women to live those words.

As Peggy and I ascended Meherabad Hill on Silence Day, we passed dozens of other silent pilgrims. Some smiled and folded their hands in the traditional Hindu greeting known as *Namaste* ("the God in me salutes the God in you"). Some greeted us in the Muslim manner by placing their right hand over their heart. Some nodded, some waved, and all smiled. Many of them stopped to embrace us.

On top of Meherabad Hill stands the *Samadhi*, a stone building with its white dome shining in the sunlight. Inscribed in English on the building are the words, "Mastery in Servitude." Below the dome are symbols of the world's major religions—the Christian cross, a mosque, a Hindu temple, a Buddhist temple, and a torch representing Zoroastrianism. Meher Baba said that he belonged to no religion; that the same Truth lies at the heart of all religions, and that his mission was to bring all religions together like beads on a string.

A line of quietly standing people extended from the entrance of the tomb out through a covered vestibule. Others sat on benches, and a few stood, hands folded in prayer, by the windows of the tomb. Some sat or stood on a shaded platform nearby, and others walked about or clustered in groups. The majority were Indians, but perhaps one-fourth were from North America, Europe and Australia.

On the wall of the vestibule was a sign reading: "Things that are real are given and received in Silence." Next to the words was a photograph of Meher Baba holding his forefinger to his lips as if to remind us to refrain from speaking.

Inside the tomb a white marble slab is engraved with the words:

Eternal Beloved
Avatar Meher Baba
February 25, 1894–January 31, 1969
"I have come not to teach but to awaken."

Bowing one's head at the Master's feet is known as taking *darshan*, or coming into the presence of the Divine Beloved. Most pilgrims, after crossing the threshold into the tomb, sink to their knees at the foot of the marble slab and rest their forehead on the marble. However, there are no prescribed rituals for pilgrims. On practically every day of the year (except at morning and evening *arati*, when prayers are recited and songs and hymns are sung in several languages), it is permissible to sit on the stone floor of the tomb for as long as you wish.

Inside the *Samadhi*, I felt the almost overpowering presence of a love that transcends understanding, and a total acceptance of each of us as we are, without qualification or condemnation. As Peggy and I sat there, experiencing God's Silent Word in the depths of our hearts, it seemed that the entire countryside was observing silence with us. The birds that usually chirp and sing outside the *Samadhi* were strangely silent, and the ubiquitous Indian dogs were not barking in the nearby village. I heard no bleating of goats, no creaking of bullock carts, no shepherds calling to their animals, no honking of horns on the road at the bottom of the hill. Not even the whine of a mosquito disturbed the tranquility of the moment. All the world had paused, it seemed, to pay respect to Meher Baba's silence.

Observing silence on July 10 was not a new experience for us. Like many followers of Meher Baba around the world, we always try to ar-

range our schedules in order to be silent from midnight of July 9 to midnight on July 10. However, this year was the first time we had spent our day of silence at Meher Baba's home in India, where he lived and worked and began his silence, and where he left his mortal frame.

Emerging from the *Samadhi*, we visited a small hut where Meher Baba used to sleep, and which is known as Baba's Room. Here we encountered a group of friends from Norway, Australia and the States, most of whom we had not seen in years. After we all embraced, grinning and gesturing, Peggy and I went to have tea—without conversation—with Mansari, a tiny Indian lady who has lived on Meherabad Hill for 55 years. When we first met Mansari, 20 years ago, she told us an amazing story. In 1949, when Meher Baba was leaving on a journey, he gave her a stick for protection in his absence. Not long after Baba left, Mansari woke one night with a large cobra on her chest. In a sudden swift move she threw the cobra to the floor, and then she realized she had forgotten to keep the stick nearby. Dashing from the hut, she ran barefooted in darkness across a field to retrieve the stick, and, returning, killed the co-

bra. Then she saw that the form of Meher Baba had materialized in the room and was looking at her with a serious expression. Mansari crawled back in bed and feasted on her lovely vision of Baba until the sun came up and the image faded.

During the afternoon we visited Meher Baba's *Jhopdi*, or hut, a stone's throw from the Pilgrim Centre. On July 10, 1925, when Meher Baba began his silence, he was living in the *Jhopdi*. He was 31 years old and already widely known in India as a *Sadguru*, or Perfect Master. He had a rich baritone voice, and he loved to sing and tell stories. None of his *mandali* (close disciples), believed he would be silent for more than a short period, since he had given them no hint that his silence would be lasting.

Leaving the *Jhopdi*, we walked to a nearby wooden structure known as the Table Room. In 1925, after he began his silence, Meher Baba spent hours every day in the tiny box-like room, writing in longhand a book that he said would reveal may hitherto unknown spiritual facts and would be published when the world was ready for its truths. Today no one seems to know the whereabouts of the book.

Leaving the Table Room, we sat for a time in Mandali Hall, a large room where Baba used to sit with his followers and guests. On the porch of Mandali Hall we silently greeted Mohammed the *Mast* (a God-intoxicated soul), who has lived most of his life near his revered master, and is now cared for by some of Baba's western followers.

As the day drew to a close, we rested beneath a giant banyan tree, watching the clouds change color, while silhouettes of people and animals moved against the orange backdrop of sky.

I felt at that moment that the silent love of Meher Baba was radiating outward from Meherabad to embrace the whole world, lifting all souls toward the glorious dawn of a new day.

Is it Possible to Please God?

IRVING MACE

A man who had once lost everything life has to offer because of addiction to drugs and alcohol reflects on his new commitment to searching for God's will.

In memory of the loving Christ in Christmas, I share with you the following words written by an American Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton. His great celebrity became a double edged sword that he found himself enduring for the sake of God. Merton wanted to write, pray and live in solitude, but fame filtered through his monastic enclosure, and he often found himself "praying like a businessman." And from within the pain of frustration and confusion came this resolve:

> MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.
>
> *Thomas Merton*, Thoughts in Solitude

Merton's disciplined life came to an end when he was accidentally electrocuted by a defective fan he touched on December 9, 1968. He was in Bangkok, Thailand, attending a Christian-Buddhist conference after 18 years of seclusion as a priest and monk. By his own words Merton remained "confused" about many things, especially his own lot in life.

What endeared me to Father Louis—Merton's Trappist name—was not his spirituality, his writing abilities, or his great intelligence. I came to love Merton because of his uniquely humbled humanity; a humanity that none of us can escape, not even the most contemplative monk. Neither the quiet of solitude, the oblivion of drugs, nor the love of another

Irving "R.J." Mace is a freelance writer and newspaper columnist in Massachusetts.

Great Spirit

Kent I. Groff

Great Spirit: Grant
Us eyes to see thee
God in all things
All things in God:
CONCEALED IN THE MANGER
EMBODIED ON THE WOOD
REVEALED AS THE STRANGER
In Bethlehem's Stable
On Golgotha's tree
At Emmaus's table
Would we see thee!
Our Host & our Guest
Born among the beasts
Our Most & our Best
Among us as the least.
HELP ME GO ON DOING GOOD
PROTECT US FROM ALL DANGER
AND TRANSFORM ME AS YOU WOULD.

human being can ever free us from ourselves. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we take ourselves along with us. Merton came face to face with himself every day of his life, in every word he wrote, every prayer he prayed, and in every thought. That he came to accept himself and to accept the road he was on we see in his one simple sentence: "But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you." I understand those words to mean that although I will never be perfect, I must never stop trying.

Christmas is a time to consider all that Christ stood and died for. It is also a wonderful time to reflect on our own behavior. How have we been living this year in the eyes of our fellow women and men, loved ones, co-workers, neighbors, friends and strangers, and especially, God? Has our integrity remained intact? Have we done all that we can to make this world a better place, or have we made a better place for ourselves alone? If we were to die suddenly and unexpectedly, as Merton did, would we die with the knowledge that our lives were pleasing to God?

Personally, I'm not ready to die tomorrow. There are still too many behaviors of mine that I know are not pleasing to anyone, much less to God, and certainly not to myself. But I have this much in common with Merton: I'm at least trying to please the One who made me (and in the process please myself).

In spite of my frustrating faults and confusions, I can at least say that I'm on the "road less traveled." Not only has this made all the difference, but I KNOW that it pleases God, along with everyone else who knew me when.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF GANDHI: CONVERSATIONS WITH SPIRITUAL SOCIAL ACTIVISTS

by Catherine Ingram, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA, 1993, 284 pages, paperback, $15.00.

The inspiring and informative interviews in this remarkable book reveal how, in the spirit of Gandhi, twelve remarkable women and men manage to maintain inner happiness and compassion while non-violently opposing the injustice, oppression, and ecological destruction of our world. The interviews with the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Joan Baez, Thich Nhat Hanh, Ram Dass, Cesar Chavez, Gary Snyder, Joanna Macy, David Steindl-Rast, Diane Nash, Mubarak Awad, and A.T. Ariyasnatue, reveal how a recognition of our interdependence leads to a commitment to relieve suffering. Helping others, it seems, heals the wounded heart and deepens joy as we come to understand, with Martin Luther King, Jr. "that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars." *PW*

FOR A FUTURE TO BE POSSIBLE

by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA, 1993, 282 pages, paperback, $16.00.

In this wonderful book, Zen master and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh and fourteen prominent co-authors, including Robert Aitken, Richard Baker, Joan Halifax, Maxine Hong Klingston, Jack Kornfield, Gary Snyder, David Steindl-Rast and Arthur Waskow, among others, comment on Buddhism's "Five Wonderful Precepts." The foundation of ethics and morality, these precepts, based on the practice of mindfulness, show us the way to sustain a compassionate and sane life together, both in our personal life and in society. The insightful and penetrating commentaries on the precepts, by some of the wisest and most compassionate spiritual guides of our time, offer challenging responses to the most difficult moral dilemmas we face. *PW*

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We welcome articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience, religious faith or practices, and similar topics. Preference is given to experiential manuscripts. Manuscripts should not exceed 1500 words, should be typed, double spaced, on 8 ½ by 11 inch paper, on a 5 ¼ inch floppy minidisk, 2S/2D, or 2S/HD, or on 3 ½ HD microdisks, in WordPerfect and sent to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542-3227. Please include a biography of no more than five lines.

This publication is made possible by the generous contributions of our readers and the generosity of the late Eli Lilly.

Vol. 44, No. 6

FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

291 Witherspoon Street
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